

2 Mine Hazards Unchecked After 8-Month Warning

Dangerous conditions found by U. S. inspectors and not corrected since, may be responsible for blast that trapped 31 miners.

(Special to The Gazette and Daily)
Washington, Dec. 30.—In the Straight Creek Coal Co.'s mine in Bell County, Ky., where an explosion last week trapped 31 miners, several hazardous conditions were found when the mine was last inspected by the U. S. Bureau of Mines, on Aug. 14 and 15.

The Bureau has no way of knowing how many, if any, of its mine inspector's numerous safety recommendations had been put into effect by the company at the time of the explosion.

Faults Unchecked

It may be significant, however, that the Federal mine inspector, Wilbur Stiles of Norton, Va., noted in the report on his August inspection that fire-hazardous conditions in the electrical system and equipment were "essentially unchanged" since the previous inspection last January.

The Bureau of Mines has no power to enforce its findings. That task Congress left up to the States when it passed the Federal Mine Inspection Act of 1941. State enforcement is generally ineffective. Except in Pennsylvania, where the inspectors are under Civil Service, mine inspector jobs are political which change with the administration. The average inspector has his eyes on a mine owner's pocket rather than on the safety of the miners.

Stiles found many things wrong in the Straight Creek mine, including three factors any one of which could have caused the explosion:

The ventilation was faulty. Without proper ventilation, gas is left in the mine instead of being sucked out. One theory is that gas gathered in the mine during the long Christmas holiday and was ignited in any of a number of ways when work was resumed Wednesday.

Faults in the electrical system and equipment had not been corrected by August although Stiles pointed them out in January. The August report said most surface buildings and ground wiring, were without proper insulation and lacked fuses. Open-type switches were generally used. It said electrical equipment was not properly grounded. Under these conditions, it found, a spark from a short circuit could have set off the accumulated gas.

Control of coal dust was deficient. In the absence of coal dust, a gas explosion need not be too serious; there is the flash from the blast and nothing more. But if coal dust is present or uncontrolled, the rush of air from the blast stirs up the dust, which is then ignited like gunpowder, causing flames to break out.

There are two ways of controlling coal dust. One is by wetting the coal dust itself. The other is by dusting the inside of the mine with pulverized lime—rock dusting, it is called. In case of an explosion the lime dust absorbs the heat, preventing it from igniting the coal dust.

Both methods should be used. Neither was used in the Straight Creek mine at the time of the August inspection.

No Fire Extinguishers

The Federal inspector also found that no fire-fighting equipment was provided in the mine, no fire-fighting organization maintained.

General safety conditions were found lacking. There was no safety director or safety organization. No adequate first-aid supplies were provided and none of the employees had been trained in first aid or mine rescue in recent years. No operating standards or safety rules had been adopted.

Accident-frequency rates rose sharply during the first five months of this year. Inspector Stiles pointed out that the mine produced only 2101 tons of coal for each disability—compared with an average of 10,000 tons in all bituminous mines.

UMW headquarters here said 29 of the trapped miners were

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MINE VILLAGE STRUCK BY UNDERGROUND DISASTER—This is a general view of the village clustered around the Kentucky Straight Creek Coal company's No. 1 mine, Pineville, Ky., in which about 30 miners were trapped by an explosion far underground December 26. Relatives and friends of the entombed men are gathered at the entrance to the mine (arrow) in center, background. Homes of miners in foreground and on hillside at left.

Conciliators Work To Avert Western Electric Strike

19,000 workers set Jan. 3 as strike date with possible sympathy tie-up of 450,000 telephone employees.

New York, Dec. 30 (AP)—Federal conciliators reentered the Western Electric company wage dispute today in an effort to avert a scheduled walkout Jan. 3 of about 19,000 workers in New Jersey and New York and a possible sympathy strike of 450,000 telephone workers throughout the nation.

Jacob R. Mandelbaum, U. S. conciliation commissioner, arranged a meeting for later in the day with Henry Mayer, counsel for the Western Electric Employees association (Ind.), and announced he hoped to meet with company officials tomorrow.

Later, H. R. Colwell, regional director of the U. S. Conciliation service, said an effort would be made to bring company and union officials together either tomorrow or Tuesday.

The union yesterday fixed Jan. 3 at 11 a. m. as the definite hour for the strike of Western Electric workers. Joseph E. Beirne, president of the National Federation of Telephone Workers (Ind.), with which the WEEA is affiliated, immediately asked President Truman to intervene. Beirne told the President a nation-wide sympathy walkout of telephone workers was a possibility.

Colwell said today the conciliation service was resuming its efforts to avert the strike "in light of conditions and not because of word from Washington."

Mayer, the union attorney, expressed belief the conciliation service was motivated by Beirne's telegram.

The union is asking a 30 per cent wage increase, and the company has offered 15 per cent. Mayer said the union was "prepared to negotiate at any time and at any place" to avert the strike.

married and had a total of 150 children, ranging from two to 12 children to a family.

"The camp itself" said the UMW, "is a deplorable, ramshackle place on a hillside, up a hollow six miles from Pineville."

The UMW added that the miners and their families were not covered by the Kentucky compensation law. Several years ago the Kentucky Supreme Court invalidated a compulsory law. Since then it has been up to each company to decide whether it wants to come under the act. The Straight Creek Co. elected not to.

When you use the Little Ads you are talking direct to a big audience. Try it. Adv.

U. S. Trained And Equipped Dutch Troops Arrive In Java

Batavia, Java, Dec. 30 (AP)—Two thousand American-trained and equipped Dutch marines arrived off Batavia today, and the British said they probably would disembark within a few days.

The cabinet of the unrecognized Indonesian republic met immediately presumably to discuss the landings.

The Indonesians had protested the movement of additional Dutch forces into the Netherlands East Indies, but in this particular case had agreed sometime ago to allow the marines to be brought in to replace Ambonese natives serving in the Dutch army. Premier Sutan Sjahrir said. Sjahrir was prevented by illness from attending the cabinet meeting.

In announcing the marines' arrival, Allied Headquarters said

they would relieve Dutch native troops "who are going outside Batavia."

British authorities announced the arrest of 91 persons in a search of Batavia. Those taken into custody included seven whom the British described as "well known Indonesian terrorist leaders."

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At the same time he reported that the division's E bond quota of \$382,725 fell short by only \$17,275, made possible through a herculean effort put forth during the past week when E bond sales totalled about \$65,000.

Leibowitz praised the retail store employees for their excellent job, pointing out that York Retail division quota was greater than that of any other city of comparable size in the state.

"Most of the credit should go to the retail employees who sold the biggest portion of the bonds," Leibowitz said.

He pointed out that 58 per cent of all bonds were sold outside store hours.

The cooperation of the Retail Merchants bureau also was praised by Leibowitz.

Serving with Leibowitz on the Retail division steering committee were Mrs. Marie Strickhouser, Virginia George, Mrs. Sally Oberdick and Sanford B. Folckmer.

Stores which cooperated in the sale of bonds and the reporting chairmen for the various groups follow: Yorktown Service Stores, J. H. Hess; C. H. Bear and Co., Mrs. Margaret Brennenman; Bon-Ton, Mrs. Anne Feltrow; P. Wiets Son, Mildred N. Haffner.

Men's Ready-to-Wear, Flinchbaugh Bros., Gregory's Griffiths-Smith, Hub store, Lehman's, Rukla's and Walkers, Kenneth (Continued on Page Thirty-Nine)

See Bond Drive

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Death Toll Of Trapped Miners Mounts To Five

Last of eight survivors carried out, dies. Rescue crews continue search for 19 entombed men still not accounted for.

Pineville, Ky., Dec. 30 (AP)—The death toll in a coal mine explosion near here last Wednesday morning mounted to at least five today as one of the men carried out alive Friday died this afternoon.

Wearry rescue crews continue to search for 19 or more miners still unaccounted for in the wrecked tunnel of the Kentucky Straight Creek Coal company number one mine.

Tom McQueen, 30, Magnet, Ky., died in the Pineville Community hospital about 2 p. m. Central Standard Time, today without regaining consciousness. He was married but had no children.

He was one of the nine miners found alive in the fire-swept mine more than 53 hours after the explosion trapped 31 or more men about 8:30 a. m. Wednesday. Albert Bennett, 64, Pineville, died before he could be brought to the surface. McQueen was the last of the eight survivors carried out of the tunnel and he was in an oxygen tent until he died.

Experienced miners held little hope for the survival of the 19 or more men still unaccounted for but the rescue work did not slacken.

Three Bodies Found
Late last night word was sent up that four bodies had been found but today officials said that was a mistake—three not four were found.

The bodies of Mine Foreman Nath Centers, 62, and Hobart S. Friddle, 44, were brought out of the mine this morning. They were badly burned but were identified by company officials and relatives. Both were married. Centers had three children and S. Friddle five.

Two of the dead were found on their knees and there was evidence that they had dragged themselves several feet. They were badly burned.

Conditions Bad
Fires, which have plagued the rescue crews since they first entered the blasted tunnel, were reported all under control or extinguished today but men who came up to the surface said conditions in the mine were bad.

The volunteers had to proceed slowly because the explosion had blocked the main tunnel and side rooms and had loosened the first supports. The rescue crews also ran into dangerous fumes at intervals.

A relief fund has been started (Continued on Page Thirty-Nine)

See Death Toll